

Assistant Secretary Linda Thomas-Greenfield's Remarks
"Africa's Place on the World Stage"
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Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

- Good afternoon, everyone. Dr. Pham, thanks to you and the Atlantic Council team for inviting me here today and for organizing this event. Ambassadors and colleagues from embassies throughout Africa and beyond, friends from across the U.S. government, and friends of Africa: thank you so much for being here.
- Tomorrow will be my final day as Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of African Affairs. I leave with tremendous pride in what we have accomplished and humbled by the challenges I leave behind for my successor.
- As you may have heard, I'm not going too far away. I've accepted a State Department detail as a Senior Fellow at Georgetown University's Institute for the Study of Diplomacy. I plan to remain focused on Africa while I'm there and continue to help prepare the next generation to make a difference in Africa and in the public service.
- I've had an amazing 35 years in the Foreign Service with amazing assignments, but my true passion is Africa. So this afternoon I'd like to share with you some thoughts about Africa's place on the world stage, some of the challenges facing the continent, the successes of the U.S. partnership with Africa, and where I see Africa in the coming decade.
- I'll try to answer some key issues facing Africa that I have aimed to address throughout my tenure, including:
 - How can we help Africa address its surging youth population;
 - How more jobs, economic growth, and investment in Africa can be created, providing opportunities for its youth;
 - How best to partner with Africa in countering terrorism and conflict; and
 - Where Africa might be in the next decade on the world stage.

AFRICA THEN AND NOW

- When one hears the word "Africa", the mind jumps reflectively to headlines in the news: conflict, terrorism, crisis, famine, disease, and poverty. True – these problems exist. But they do not define Africa. And I know the audience here today knows this more than anyone.

- The Africa I have come to know and believe in is a continent – a continent of vast opportunity and promise. It's a continent with tremendous natural and human resources, and a rapidly expanding middle class. It is the next frontier for global opportunities. And it is a continent that has made remarkable progress despite the challenges.
- I've seen that progress first-hand over the past 39 years. When I first visited Africa in 1978 to do research in Liberia, the continent's population was about 450 million, with 27 percent living in urban areas. Fast forward to 2017, and the population is now over 1.2 billion, with 40 percent living in urban areas.
- The GDP of sub-Saharan Africa back in 1978 was about \$170 billion. Now, it's about \$1.6 trillion. The percentage of people living on less than \$1.25 a day in sub-Saharan Africa has dropped from 56 percent in 1990 to 41 percent today.
- When I arrived in Liberia in 1978, I found a continent that suffered from repressive governance, military coups, and violence. That was the norm for many African countries in those days. But now, we're seeing a different picture. Liberia has emerged as a champion of democracy and peace; in 2005, it elected Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as the continent's first female president. She has served two terms and will oversee the first transition in Liberia's history of a sitting president to a democratically elected successor. Both Ghana and Nigeria had been under military-controlled governments. They are both, now, beacons of democracy.
- Many African countries have had successful democratic elections in recent years – South Africa, Namibia, Nigeria, Ghana, Cabo Verde, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Benin – and The Gambia, where I attended three weeks ago the presidential inauguration that marked the country's first successful democratic transition of power after a 22 year dictatorship.
- In the health arena, life expectancy in Africa was about 47 years in 1978; now it's 60. The child mortality rate has dropped 52 percent between 1990 and 2015, and the maternal mortality rate has fallen 49 percent. An AIDS-free generation and a polio-free Africa are within reach.
- In education, sub-Saharan Africa has made greater improvements in access to education since 1990 than any other region of the world. The proportion of children enrolled in primary or secondary school has risen 54 percent over the past 25 years.
- In large part because of progress in these critical areas and others, Africa is becoming a major global player. The world is sitting up and taking notice, and there has been an explosion of investment and interest in Africa in the last two decades.
- The truth is we can't meet today's global challenges without Africa. When one thinks about ending poverty, fighting extremism, and boosting economic growth, Africa is central to these

efforts.

CHALLENGES FACING AFRICA

- Looking ahead, where Africa ends up on the world stage in the next century will depend on how well the continent tackles its own challenges this century. It will also depend on how the United States and the international community partner with Africa to help achieve its promise.
- So let's take a look at some of the challenges Africa faces, and how to address them. I'm going to highlight five.

1) YOUTH BULGE

- First, at the top of the list is Africa's youth bulge. Africa is a young continent. Half of all Africans are under the age of 19; Africa's population is projected to double to two billion people by 2050.
- How do we ensure that this youthful population contributes to Africa's prosperity?
- I believe this starts with creating opportunity for Africa's youth. That means creating jobs. It also means strengthening education systems. It means mentoring and providing opportunity. In spite of recent progress, there is still a significant education deficit in Africa. Countries need to invest more in education, including primary school, particularly for girls. Weak education means weak opportunity, and when youth have no opportunity, they are susceptible to extremist ideology, trafficking, criminality, and fleeing to Europe on rickety, unsafe boats.
- Programs that support youth such as the Young African Leaders Initiative, otherwise known as YALI, were created to build concrete opportunities – to give Africa's future leaders the educational skills and capacity they need to move their countries forward. We have seen the creativity, energy, and ambitions of young African leaders.
- Africa's youth are its single greatest resource and they are a force for good. African leaders should view them as a treasure and a source of dynamism to bring their countries out of poverty and into strong, prosperous, and successful governments. If we can ensure Africa's youth are engaged and contributing to their countries, Africa's economy will grow and its people will prosper.

2) BOOSTING ECONOMIC GROWTH

- That brings me to a second key challenge – boosting Africa's economic growth. While Africa's overall economic trends are favorable, economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa decelerated sharply from 3.4 percent in 2015 to about 1.6 percent in 2016.

- How do we turn this around? What tools do we have to help our African partners increase jobs, investment, and trade?
- First of all, we simply need to encourage more investment in Africa. In fact, investors already doing business in Africa remain overwhelmingly positive about the continent's prospects and potential. On the other hand, those not doing business in Africa have remained on the sidelines, largely because they don't have a good understanding of the real opportunities that exist. We need to correct misperceptions of risks and educate companies about the opportunities.
- It may be that some companies doing business in Africa don't really want the competition to know they're making money, they don't want to rock the boat, so they're just as happy that their potential competitors continue to view Africa as more risky than it really is. Just a thought!
- Creating jobs also depends on strengthening women's participation in all aspects of society. Only 8.5 percent of African workers earning wages in the non-agricultural sector are women. Half of all women in Africa over the age of 15 cannot read or write. We need to empower African women, because when women are empowered, they invest in their children, families, communities, and countries.
- The United States is not the only player in Africa. We also want to encourage other countries to invest. I often get asked about China's role in Africa. Africa is a huge continent. There's room for everyone to work there, and there are opportunities for all. It's up to African countries to look at potential investors and pursue the best deals for their countries and their people.
- We think U.S. companies and U.S. corporate culture have a particularly good story to tell in Africa and we know that when given a choice, African countries prefer American companies because of the values we bring to the table.

3) DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

- A third key challenge for Africa is establishing strong democratic governance and eliminating corruption. While we've seen progress in some places, too often we see African leaders clinging to power. When leaders refuse to prepare for transition -- sooner or later -- instability, if not outright civil war, is the result. Laurent Gbagbo's refusal to step down after losing the election in Cote d'Ivoire is a case in point.
- Corruption remains rampant, and it has to end. In a 2015 survey by Transparency International, 58 percent of Africans said corruption had grown worse over the preceding 12 months. The same survey revealed that 22 percent of Africans (one in every five!) had paid a bribe to officials.
- Corruption actively works against justice and promotes exclusion and poverty by denying the most vulnerable in Africa basic needs and security. It also stifles development.

- A 2002 African Union study estimated that corruption costs the continent roughly \$150 billion per year. That figure is surely much higher today. These vast sums could be used for improving infrastructure, building schools, and investing in youth throughout the continent. We must work with governments to end corruption by holding people accountable and help them recover stolen wealth.
- How can we promote democratic transitions of power, stability, and democracy in general?
- This is an area where regional organizations can play a significant role, and they are doing so. Take The Gambia, for example: When President Jammeh reneged on his commitment to accept the results of The Gambia's presidential election in December 2016, the Economic Community of West African States stepped up and took a stand for democracy.
- ECOWAS, together with others, including Mauritania and Morocco, organized a strong diplomatic campaign, with outreach by multiple heads of state, to influence President Jammeh to give up power.
- In support of diplomatic efforts, ECOWAS military forces amassed on the borders of The Gambia and in the end Jammeh got the message and stepped aside, ceding power to the winner of the election – President Barrow. This was an excellent example of an African-conceived and African-managed effort.
- The African Union (AU) is also a major player in promoting democracy, and they have been an advocate for free, fair, and democratic elections, and peaceful transitions of power, even while some leaders living in glass palaces are reluctant to criticize their peers.
- Ultimately, this is about the will of the African people. An Afrobarometer survey last year indicated that more than two-thirds in Africa say democracy is preferable to any other form of government, and a survey in 2015 indicated that three quarters support term limits. Africans want democracy! We need to capitalize on this sentiment by helping build the capacity of civil society and electoral commissions and help deliver elections that represent the will of the people.

4) SECURITY

- Fourth on the list of challenges is ending conflict and countering terrorism. South Sudan's civil war has devastated the country for three years now, leading to a famine – an entirely man-made famine. South Sudan's leaders are themselves responsible for that famine.
- Boko Haram continues to tear apart local communities in Nigeria and the greater Lake Chad Basin area. Al-Shabaab, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and other terrorist groups continue to undermine the stability of countries throughout the continent.

- How do we partner with Africa to end the devastating impact of terrorism?
- This is another key area where regional organizations are making a difference. The AU has taken a leading role addressing Africa's security challenges through standing up regional and AU peacekeeping missions and by building up funding for these missions.
- The State Department is supporting the AU's efforts, having trained over 315,000 peacekeepers for deployment to AU and UN peacekeeping missions over the past 12 years.
- The long-term solution to ending violence, however, will depend on addressing the root causes of conflict, which include poor governance, weak economies, and lack of opportunity. This is the work that the United States must be engaged in. And we have to succeed – not just for Africa's immediate security, but for Africa's future and our own security.

5) HUMANITARIAN

- A fifth and final challenge is meeting humanitarian needs throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Due to conflict, drought, or both, millions are at risk of starvation in different parts of the continent. On February 20, famine was declared in parts of South Sudan. Two other African countries – Nigeria and Somalia – face a credible risk of famine this year.
- How do we help African nations address these issues?
- One of the core issues involves building the capacity of governments and civil society to address critical humanitarian issues such as drought and famine. In the meantime, we must work with the international community and other donors to provide humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable people.
- In places like South Sudan, where the crisis is man-made and conflict-driven, government and opposition leaders have a responsibility to put aside political ambitions for the good of their people. They must ensure that relief efforts are not impeded and allow food and other critical assistance to reach people who need it most.

THE FUTURE

- Despite the challenges I have just outlined, I continue to be optimistic about Africa's future. Africa has tremendous possibility with its resources – both natural and especially its people. If Africa can effectively harness these resources, its future is bright. We know that with only a few resources African youth and women are developing businesses that are creating jobs and providing opportunities for the next generation.
- The renewed focus on improving infrastructure is another beacon of hope: energy, roads, schools, and hospitals will lay the path for investors and economic growth.
- Turning Africa's challenges into opportunities takes hard work, but we are making progress. For me, that optimism comes more than anything else from Africa's youth, who I meet with

every time I travel to the continent. Their talent, drive, and dedication are changing their countries for the better.

- Ultimately, Africa's success depends on a strong U.S.-Africa relationship and continued engagement, and that requires a team effort. Regardless of whether you are inside government or outside government, everyone in this room has a role to play in ensuring that the U.S. partnership with Africa is successful. Africa needs your ideas, your passion, your advocacy, and your teamwork.
- I look forward to staying engaged with you as we protect American interests by helping Africa achieve its promise and its place on the global world stage. Thank you.